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DISCUSSION UPON A PROPOSED INTER-OCEANIC CANAL THROUGH NICARAGUA.

THE MEETING OF November 29, 1876.

Colonel T. Bailer Myers, in taking the chair, said :

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—In assuming again, under instructions, the chair of the Society, it affords me pleasure to welcome you to the first of a series of informal meetings, which will be hereafter held at stated times in our new home, for the consideration of subjects of geographical interest ; and I regret that Chief Justice Daly is still prevented by illness from being present and giving you his views as to the introduction of this new feature in our organization.

The gentleman who will first address you has already, although young, served his country for several years in Europe. The subject on which he will speak is to his countrymen one of local importance, with the details of which he has become familiar. His residence here has been short, but in Paris and Geneva he had already associated himself with sister societies ; and a familiarity which I have discovered in him with the minutest details of our own early history and the characters of our public men, which would be remarkable even in one of our young countrymen, seems an assurance of the great reliability as to the details of the proposed interoceanic communication long projected so near to his home. He will make a few remarks only, preliminary to a paper which he proposes to offer to the Society hereafter, more fully considering the historical, geographical, political and economical features of the undertaking.

I have the pleasure to present to you Señor Manuel M. Peralta, Minister Resident of Costa Rica.

REMARKS OF SENOR MANUEL M. PERALTA.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—You know that all the maritime powers are more or less deeply interested in the opening of an interoceanic canal through the Isthmus of Central America, and that governments as well as private companies have made explorations

in the different parts which seemed most favorable to the realization of this great enterprise.

Thus, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Isthmus of Nicaragua (between the Lake of Nicaragua and the Pacific), and the Isthmus of Darien have been, on many occasions and by various routes, frequently surveyed—sometimes by private companies, sometimes under the auspices of the different interested governments.

It seems to me unnecessary to say, in this place, that of all these undertakings, the ones which the scientific world has considered as the most complete, the most intelligently and conscientiously conducted—in fact, the only ones which deserve public confidence—are those which have been made by order of the government of the United States, and with which you have been made acquainted by the excellent report of my honorable friend Commodore Ammen.

The government of the United States, taking into consideration the numerous surveys that have been made by its own officers and by other parties, and in order to avoid differences of opinion on this matter, thought it right to organize a commission of engineers, and other eminent men of science, to study and examine these surveys with that scrupulous diligence and impartiality peculiar to scientific men, and which are required by the very high interests at stake.

The honorable secretary of the navy, in his annual report of 1875, says to the president of the United States that the Washington commission, after the most careful examination of all the different surveys, came to the unanimous conclusion that the one known as the Nicaraguan route, beginning at Greytown (at the mouth of the San Juan river), or near that point, on the Atlantic coast, and ending in the northern bank of the Rio del Brito, on the Pacific coast, offers the most advantages and presents less difficulties than any other known route across the isthmus.

This conclusion, adds the honorable secretary of the navy, commands the highest respect, considering the character of the commission and the work accomplished by them.

In corroboration of the above, allow me to quote the words which the president of the United States addressed to me in March last :

“ The relations of all maritime powers, and especially of this country, with yours, are of particular interest at this juncture, from the impression destined, as I believe, to become general, that the

canal between the two oceans must, in part at least, pass through the territories of Costa Rica."

All doubts on scientific grounds, as regards the well-deserved preference of the Nicaraguan route, having been cleared away, the question of the canal leaves the sphere of speculation and conjecture, so to speak, and enters upon that of practical action.

The present time is one of transition, or, I should be more exact in saying, a period of action preliminary to the execution of this gigantic work.

To assure the future of the enterprise it is necessary to find means for its execution and to surround it with all the protection and guaranty which the interests of commerce and civilization demand.

A great public work like this canal, whose owners and customers will be the civilized world, ought to be neutral. This was already stipulated by the Clayton-Bulwer treaty of 1850 between the United States and Great Britain, and it can be asserted that the other maritime powers receive with pleasure and are disposed to recognize the neutrality of the interoceanic canal.

Of course those most interested in this neutrality, as well as in the execution of the work, are the States of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, through whose territories passes the route adopted by the scientific commission of Washington.

The governments of these two republics have always manifested their anxiety to promote any enterprise tending to extend to their people, to all America, and, in a word, to the commerce of the world a work of such conceded importance to all, and they may be relied upon not to omit any action necessary on their part to assure its completion.

The republic of Costa Rica extending along the border of the contemplated canal is willing to recognize and to maintain the neutrality of the canal, and to extend that privilege to any territory necessary to its use or protection lying within its sovereignty.

Any enterprise which obtains the support of the maritime powers and that of her sister state, Nicaragua, will be accepted and supported by Costa Rica, because the interests of our country and the aspiration of our government are those of civilization and progressive humanity.

I wish to express to you my gratitude for the opportunity you afford me of uniting in the consideration of this important project with the members of a Society the reputation and usefulness of

which I became familiar with while engaged in my duties, and in associations with scientific societies in Europe whom I have found to rely upon your national explorations.

Mr. Jas. T. Gardner then said :

Mr. Chairman, in moving a vote of thanks to Señor Peralta for his very valuable communication I would call attention to its peculiar importance as indicating progress in the solution of the American Isthmus canal problem.

Before private capital can venture to embark in the great enterprise of building this ship canal two preliminary points must be determined : First, all possible routes have to be examined, the relative advantages of each clearly understood, and the best one selected by competent judges. Our government has spent many years and much money in exploring the various lines by which it was thought canals might easily cross the isthmus. A commission consisting of the chief of the bureau of navigation, the chief of engineers of the army and the superintendent of the United States coast survey was constituted to consider the results of these surveys and they have reported in favor of the Costa Rica and Nicaragua route. The facts upon which their opinion is based are summarized in the valuable paper of Commodore Ammen, read before this Society. This first, and in some respects most difficult, question may therefore be considered as settled, or nearly so.

The second point is to determine the political status of the great highway.

Costa Rica, through her minister, Señor Peralta, assures us that she will concede a belt of neutral territory for the purposes of a ship canal through her domain, and I am authoritatively informed that Nicaragua is prepared to do the same. Thus the communication so kindly made to us by Señor Peralta marks the second great step in the progress toward an American Isthmus canal, and I have the pleasure of moving a vote of thanks to the honorable speaker.

The vote of thanks was then passed unanimously.